

Guidance on Documentation and Coding for Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate

Overview

Cleft lip and palate are openings or splits in the upper lip, the roof of the mouth (palate) or both. Cleft lip and palate result when facial structures that are developing in an unborn baby don't close completely and are among the most common birth defects.

Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate (Q35-Q37)

Causes of orofacial clefts among most infants are unknown. Some children have a cleft lip or palate because of changes in their genes. Some are thought to be caused by a combination of genes and other factors such as things the mother comes in contact with in her environment and certain medications used during pregnancy.

Several risk factors may increase the likelihood of a baby developing a cleft lip and cleft palate, including:

- Parents with a family history of the condition.
- Exposure to certain substances during pregnancy.
- Women who have diabetes.

Symptoms are usually immediately identifiable at birth. They may appear as:

- A split in the lip and roof of the mouth (palate) that affects one or both sides of the face.
- A split in the lip that appears as only a small notch in the lip or extends from the lip through the upper gum and palate into the bottom of the nose.
- A split in the roof of the mouth that doesn't affect the appearance of the face.

Complications vary depending on the type and severity of the cleft. Some complications include:

- Difficulty feeding: one of the most immediate concerns after birth.
- Ear infections and hearing loss.
- Dental problems in which tooth development may be affected.
- Speech difficulties because the palate is used in forming sounds.

Treatment for children with orofacial clefts can vary depending on the severity of the cleft, the child's age/needs, and the presence of associate syndromes or other birth defects, or both. Surgery to repair a cleft lip usually occurs in the first few months of life and is recommended within the first 12 months of life. Surgery to repair a cleft palate is recommended within the first 18 months of life or earlier if possible.

(continued)

ICD-10-CM Code information

Q35	Cleft palate <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (additional character required)• Includes: fissure of palate, palatoschisis• Excludes: cleft palate with cleft lip (Q37.-)	Q37	Cleft palate with cleft lip <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (additional character required)• Includes: cheilopalatoschisis
Q35.1	Cleft hard palate	Q37.0	Cleft hard palate with bilateral cleft lip
Q35.3	Cleft soft palate	Q37.1	Cleft hard palate with unilateral cleft lip
Q35.5	Cleft hard palate with cleft soft palate	Q37.2	Cleft soft palate with bilateral cleft lip
Q35.7	Cleft uvula	Q37.3	Cleft soft palate with unilateral cleft lip
Q35.9	Cleft palate, unspecified	Q37.4	Cleft hard and soft palate with bilateral cleft lip
Q36	Cleft lip <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (additional character required)• Includes: cheiloschisis, congenital fissure of lip, harelip, labium leporinum• Excludes: cleft lip with cleft palate (Q37.-)	Q37.5	Cleft hard and soft palate with unilateral cleft lip
Q36.0	Cleft lip, bilateral	Q37.8	Unspecified cleft palate with bilateral cleft lip
Q36.1	Cleft lip, median	Q37.9	Unspecified cleft palate with unilateral cleft lip
Q36.9	Cleft lip, unilateral		

Documentation guidance

Provider documentation should include elements such as:

- Physical findings of the lip and palate.
- Laterality: right, left, or bilateral.
- Extension of cleft palate: hard palate, soft palate.
- Lower lip: pits present or absent.
- Describe procedures to assess further additional malformations, and if present describe.
- Take and report photographs.
- Report whether specialty consultation(s) were done, and if so, document confirmed diagnosis and/or results during a face-to-face encounter.
- Surgical procedures.

References

- “ICD-10.” Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, CMS.gov. <http://www.cms.gov/medicare/coding/icd10>
- “Cleft Palate with Cleft Lip”. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, NCBDD, 16 March 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/surveillancemanual/quick-reference-handbook/cleft-palate-cleft-lip.html>